

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Angels Kiss Me-National, 4/17/51. Trudi Michel presents new play by Scott Michel. Cast features Madeline Clive and Alan Manson. Staged by Ramsey Burch...Make A Wish-Winter Garden, 4/18/51. Rigby, Styne, Cohen production of Preston Sturges and Hugh Martin's musical based on Molnar's "The Good Fairy". Staged by John C. Wilson, with Nanette Fabray, Melville Cooper and Harold Lang...A Tree Grows In Brooklyn-Alvin, 4/19/51. Robert Fryer and George Abbott present musical version of Betty Smith's novel, adapted by Miss Smith and Mr. Abbott. Latter also staged. Cast stars Shirley Booth and Johnny Johnston. Score by Arthur Schwartz, book by Dorothy Fields...The Long Days-Empire, 4/20/51. Davis Snow new play featuring Frances Starr, Katharine Bard, Jeffrey Lynn and Neva Patterson. Production by Tait-Buell, directed by Edward Ludlum.

Digests of Current Reviews-more on back page

Night Music-ANTA Playhouse, 4/8/51-4/16/51. Slight minority of daily critics praised Equity Library Theatre production of Clifford Odets' 1940 play, which is being presented as part of ANTA limited run subscription series. Compass, Post, World Telegram & Sun and Women's Wear reviewers thought cast headed by Bette Grayson, Leonard Barry and Rod Steiger was equal to original all-star Group Theatre cast. Direction by Peter Kass and ingenious low budget sets by Richard Burns were applauded. But critics of Times, Herald Tribune, News, Mirror and Newark News panned both play and players. McClain, Journal American, and Sheaffer, Eagle, were of divided minds. They praised cast, but condemned choice of play. Several commented that script, which now is being played more for the comedy values, still seems like a poor combination of Odets and Saroyan. Watts, Post, enjoyed production, but felt central character's portrayal as written was weakest part. Pollock, Compass, combined his review with coverage of Jefferson Theatre Workshop production of same play.

The King and I-St.James, 3/29/51. First unfavorable review on Rodgers and Hammerstein's latest hit is by Marshall, Nation, who filed the sole "con" review on Guys and Dolls. The current R & H production has much beauty and charm, but not enough wit, she claims. The script defeats the fine acting by being too solemn, thin and long drawn out. Brown, SRL, and Clurman, New Republic, joined colleagues in shouting praises of new production. Brown considers the author-producers as the theatre's only professional experimentalists who seem to specialize in writing hits. They have never worked together better, though they have turned in better work. Clurman billed Hammerstein as star of evening, his lyrics saving Rodgers weak score. Both praised Gertrude Lawrence, Yul Brynner and rest of large production.

Editorial Pros and Cons

Now is the time for all good men to do something about the so-called "air-cooled" theatres which attempt to lure the playgoer come summer. Usually the system used makes so much noise, that it is impossible to hear the lines onstage. Or the system produces an unhealthy damp air which brings on unseasonal colds. Legitimate theatre owners who cry about the slack summer season might study with profit the systems used in the always filled movie palaces which live up to their slogans "20 degrees cooler inside".

News & Notes

Shuberts donated \$2000 received from Rudy Vallee as result of slanderous remarks to the Actors Fund of America...Alice S. Venezky, ANTA staff member, author of Twayne Publishers' "Pageantry on the Shakespeare Stage"...

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 'A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance'

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|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 11. Women's Wear Daily | 21. Freeman |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Wall Street Journal | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Journal of Commerce | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. George Jean Nathan | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass | 15. Ward Morehouse | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. Morning Telegraph | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Journal-American | 17. Variety | 27. Time |
| 8. World Telegram & Sun | 18. Billboard | 28. Nation |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 19. Theatre Arts | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Newark News | 20. New Leader | 30. New Yorker |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

- AFFAIRS OF STATE-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-7-8-13-17-18-27-30.
Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.
- THE AUTUMN GARDEN-Coronet, 3/7/51. Pro: 2-3-7-8-9-13-16-23-26-27-28-30.
Con: 1-4-5-6-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-20-24.
- BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 23 votes.
Con: 2-6-15-17-19-20-22.
- BILLY BUDD-Biltmore, 2/10/51. Pro: 1-6-8-9-10-13-17-23-24-25-26-27-28-29.
Con: 2-3-4-5-7-11-12-18-20-22-30.
- CALL ME MADAM-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 18-19-28-29.
So-So: 3. None: 16-21.
- THE COUNTRY GIRL-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 4-8-14-27-28-30. None: 21.
- DARKNESS AT NOON-Royale, 1/13/51. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 1-14-17-19-22-24-26-29.
So-So: 5-13-23. None: 25-28.
- GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-Ziegfeld, 12/8/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-28.
So-So: 14-18-22-23-27. None: 21-25.
- THE GREEN PASTURES-Broadway, 3/15/51. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-23-26-27-28-30.
- GUYS AND DOLLS-46th St.Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 29 votes. Con: 28.
- THE HAPPY TIME-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30.
None: 10-21.
- KISS ME KATE-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 29. None: 21-28.
- THE MOON IS BLUE-Miller, 3/8/51. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 14. None: 19-21-24-25-29.
- OUT OF THIS WORLD-Century, 12/21/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-10-11-13-23-29-30. So-So: 2.
Con: 1-3-9-12-17-18-19-20-21-22-24-26-27.
- ROMEO AND JULIET-Broadhurst, 3/10/51. Pro: 1-4-6-7-8-10-11-12-13-18-23-26-30.
Con: 2-3-5-9-14-15-16-17-20-22-27-28.
- THE ROSE TATTOO-Martin Beck, 2/3/51. Pro: 17 votes. Con: 4-6-7-14-21-24-25-27.
So-So: 8. None: 12-19-20-22.
- SEASON IN THE SUN-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 9-11-20-24-28.
So-So: 10. None: 7-13-15-16-21.
- SECOND THRESHOLD-Morosco, 1/2/51. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 4-9-13-14-17-18-20-23-27-28.
None: 15-21-24-29.
- SOUTH PACIFIC-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-11-13-15-16-17-18-19-24-25-26-30.
Con: 27. So-So: 23.
- SPRINGTIME FOR HENRY-Booth, 3/14/51. Pro: 2-3-4-5-10-12-17-18. Con: 6-7-11-14-15-23-27-28-30. So-So: 1-8.
- TWENTIETH CENTURY-Fulton, 12/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-24-28. None: 4-12-14-16-21.
- THE KING AND I-St. James, 3/29/51. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11. 25.

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' Green Room Department '
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PUBLIC & PROPHETS...Actresses, like prophets, are without honor in their own country, comments Stage editorial. Reception of Martita Hunt after 30 years of continuous and admiral work is current proof of theory. The trend has been reversed in the case of British stars who became famous only after Broadway successes. It is a sorry sight to see English artists shaking the dust of their native soil off their feet through lack of appreciation at home.

SHAKESPEARE STILL NEWS...Flurry of excitement over newly found Shakespeare notes, which may or may not be authentic, is important in itself, believes Nation editorial. It symbolizes our continued devotion, in spite of international chaos, to the eternal human values.

COLUMN TIPS...Many Connecticut summer theatres have cut each other's throats so successfully that it looks like none will open, hears Winchell...Mike Todd intends producing American version of Folies Bergere, repeats Gardner...Recent murders in neighborhood of Sidney Kingsley's New Jersey home may furnish plot for his next play, suggests Sobol.

SO IT HAPPENED...How "real" a thing may or may not have been in life has nothing to do with its appearance of reality on a stage. The plaintive playwright stubs his intellectual toe over a truism that he fails to realize. The theatre represents belief in unreality, and it demands rigid standards of unreality in order to be believable. This is the answer given by Burr, Playbill, to the playwright who cries 'but it really happened.'

SHUBERTS LAST WORD...Ticket brokers neither like or expected the Shuberts latest move of cancelling their contracts with them, reports WINS Martin Starr. But this cutting off of tickets from 14 Shubert owned houses is the Shuberts legal method of retaliation against the brokers winning an increase in fees. Seems to broadcaster that life for the Shuberts is just one battle after another.

CRITICS AWARDS REVISITED...Billboard notes with gratification that Drama Critics Circle choose Darkness At Noon, a play they have been promoting as a public service via editorials...Lyons thinks critics were inconsistent in not giving award to fellow critic Wolcott Gibbs for his new play...Sobol wonders why only four of the eight critics who voted for Billy Budd were mentioned in display ad for show.

REVIEWS & HITS...Closing notice of The Green Pastures caused reflection among critics. Watts, Post, is positive that while bad notices may wreck a play, good ones don't necessarily make a box office hit...Chapman, News, fears that the critics under-emphasized the entertainment qualities, while playing up the revival as a "work of art"...Sheaffer, Eagle, feels this proves that it is the public that makes or breaks a show.

MAIL ORDERERS SQUAWK...Variety reader complains that two theatres refuse to sell tickets by mail; the speculators and other rackets getting them all. She feels that since the papers advertise their wares, such orders should be filled or else.

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' Theatre Round Up '

Spring issue of "Theatre Time" features article by Ward Morehouse, WT&S, picking his 50 favorite players...John Chapman, News, wrote "Enchanted City" article about Radio City for American...John Mason Brown, SRL, spoke at Armstrong College, Savannah Ga...Eugene O'Neill at Doctor's Hospital is reported to weigh less than 90 pounds...ANTA and National Theatre Conference setting up fellowships and grants to aid young playwrights...Forty Broadway stars will take part in Wald-Krasna picture "The Great Moments" with all profits going to ANTA...ANTA paid off first mortgage on Playhouse.

' Interview Hi - Lights '

VINIE BURROWS...The Green Pastures actress holds down her ego by telling herself that luck has more to do with getting ahead in the theatre than talent, Hawkins, WT&S, reports. She believes that the theatre is a compulsive force that she wouldn't inject into anybody. Because she feels that most people in the theatre sleep too late, she is taking a full time law course at NYU.

BENNETT CERF...Random House publisher is convinced that most people don't read printed plays because it takes a great deal of concentration to follow them, and outside of New York and Hollywood folks have too much to do, he told Coleman, Mirror. Sales of printed plays in the two cities named equal 75 per cent of the total. Though the break even point on publishing a play is 4,000 copies, most plays sell only 3,000. But Random House has no intention of dropping its play department.

' Digests of Current Reviews '

The Green Pastures-Broadway, 3/15/51. Two minority opinions voiced against current revival of the Marc Connelly play by Clurman, New Republic and Kerr, Commonweal. Former, who had enjoyed the original production, found present revival has lost much of its momentum and sustained dramatic interest. The entire production was curiously muted and remote. Latter always thought script never was truly folklike or even religious. He could find no trace of genuine moral sentiment. But Brown, SRL, considers play and production a masterpiece. It is more than a delightful work of art or a pleasant adventure in theatre going. It is actually a religious experience of a profound and radiant sort.

The Autumn Garden-Coronet, 3/7/51. Outright "con" from George Jean Nathan and a "so-so" verdict from Kerr, Commonweal can be added to critical file for Lillian Hellman's new drama. Nathan considered it a diffuse and somnambulistic play which Harold Clurman directed in languid terms. Though he did admit some of the individual performances were attractive, Kerr doubts if his readers will be exhilarated, but he does think they will find it interesting. Main fault of script, he feels, is that conclusion of the play is much too pat.

Springtime for Henry-Booth, 3/14/51. While Marshall, Nation, and George Jean Nathan dismissed the revival of the Benn Levy long run comedy starring Edward Everett Horton as almost unfit for Broadway, Shipley, New Leader, raved. It continues to be a delightful, irreverent thrust of shrewd absurdity against the solemn forces that would burden and bind the spirit of man, he commented.

Darkness At Noon-Royale, 1/13/51. Expressing surprise at the many reviewers who billed the Koestler script as stinging propaganda, McLaughlin, Freeman, suggested these reviewers study their semantics. Actually the script dramatizes historical facts, not propaganda. It puts them into a thrilling drama made from the ideological conflict implicit in the novel. Good cast performs well in remarkably skillful surgical operation on the brain of communism.

